

BACK OF THE SECRECY IN THE ASSASSINATION PROBE

As the official probe of President Kennedy's death unfolds—

There's restlessness among some members of Chief Justice Warren's commission about its slow pace. There's questioning, too, about the veil of secrecy.

Nevertheless, from behind closed doors, a clear picture is starting to emerge.

This can now be reported about the progress of the investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy:

- The hearings, going on behind closed doors, will drag on another six months.

- When they end, Lee Harvey Oswald will not be named positively as the assassin.

- The seven-member commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, probably will come up with only one major finding—that there was no foreign plot involved in the murder.

As for Oswald, the commission has found that almost all the evidence points to him as the killer. But the panel is not expected to say so in so many words. The final verdict is to be left to the public. Reason: There just is no positive proof.

These are the indications from sources close to the probe as the inquiry, ordered by President Johnson, moves into its third month. The inquiry has been painstaking and slow—so slow that some members reportedly are thinking about resigning if it is not speeded up.

Up to mid-February, the panel had heard only two witnesses—Oswald's widow, Marina, and his mother, Mrs. Marguerite Oswald. Neither is said to have contributed anything so new or startling that it changes the story told publicly after the assassination on November 22.

Why, then, is the Oswald probe so shrouded in secrecy? This is what many Congressmen and others want answered.

Red intrigue? The issue was raised when Mr. Warren told reporters that some of the information gathered by the panel might "not be released in your lifetime." The reason, he said, was that some points might jeopardize the nation's security if made public.

Reaction to his remarks was swift. A number of Congressmen said there is no good reason for secrecy now. Demanded Representative Earl Wilson (Rep.), of Indiana: "Is the real force behind the assassination thus being protected? Was world Communism engaged in a master plot to kill our leader?"

Like other lawmakers and editors, he demanded full disclosure of the facts. Otherwise, the Congressmen argued, rumors about the assassination will continue to thrive. They pointed out that

Harder to explain are the cloak-and-dagger methods used to shield the commission staff and witnesses. The panel's fourth-floor offices in the Veterans of Foreign Wars Building—two blocks from the U. S. Capitol—are virtually off limits to the public much of the time. Reporters also are barred by police from talking to witnesses except in the lobby of the building—and then only for a few minutes.

Even the commission members won't talk publicly. Each informally agreed



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THE WARREN COMMISSION. Its investigation is designed to prevent uncertainties of the sort that surround such past tragedies as President Lincoln's assassination.

President Johnson himself ordered the commission to report its findings "to the American people and to the world."

Commission sources said later that Mr. Warren's reference to "security" had nothing to do with talk of an alleged Communist plot against President Kennedy. Rather, they said, the Chief Justice had in mind such matters as details of how the FBI investigates a case. Such information, if released, would impair future FBI operations, according to the sources, and would not change the substance of the report anyway.

The critics, however, contend the withholding of even that material could be used to hide reported bad feeling between the FBI and the Secret Service. The agencies reportedly feuded over the way the investigation was handled, although Government officials have denied the reports.

to secrecy when appointed by President Johnson on November 29.

As a result, information on the hearings comes out in bits and pieces. The only official spokesman is the Chief Justice, who answers reporters' questions for a moment or two after hearings.

Widow's testimony. It is known, however, that Oswald's Russian-born widow spent most of her time in the witness chair identifying 145 exhibits, including the rifle used to kill Mr. Kennedy. She said the gun was Oswald's.

The alleged killer's mother, however, maintained her son was innocent. She told the commission about Oswald's activities from 1959, when he moved to Russia, until he was killed by Jack Ruby, a Dallas bar owner, November 24.

At the same time, another part of the assassination picture was becoming

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clearer. High Government sources said the commission has no evidence that any "hate" groups had anything to do with the shooting. The Chief Justice implied after the tragedy that there may have been a connection, commenting that "such acts are commonly stimulated by forces of hatred."

But a five-volume FBI report before the commission is said to conclude that the assassination was the work of one man only. Careful investigation is said to have turned up no indication of any link of Oswald with Ruby or of either with any alleged Communist plotters.

The evidence includes files on Oswald's residence in Russia, turned over to the U. S. by the Soviet Union. Material was also gathered in Mexico where Oswald vainly sought permission last September to visit Cuba.

Since the FBI's documents are the commission's main source of information, the conclusions in them are expected to weigh heavily in the group's final report to President Johnson.

The size of the documents also helps to explain why the probe will take so long. The commission staff of 12 lawyers, headed by J. Lee Rankin, former U. S. Solicitor General, is poring over thousands of details, item by item.

The staff is divided into two-man teams and is probing six areas: Oswald's activities on the day of the assassination; Ruby's background and activities; Oswald's general background; details of Oswald's service in the Marine Corps and his life in Russia; circumstances of Oswald's murder, and ways used to protect President Kennedy.

"Frozen" evidence. The commission's other main task is taking testimony from key witnesses—in effect "freezing" their stories under oath. Past experience has shown that otherwise witnesses often change their accounts as the years go by. The net effect is to cast doubt on previous findings.

President Johnson wants none of that. He is well aware of the uncertainties about other major events in U. S. history—including the assassination of President Lincoln—as the result of failure to keep systematic records at the time.

Some commission members—because of all the secrecy and lengthy hearings—are said to be growing restless. Besides Mr. Warren, the group includes Senators Richard Russell (Dem.), of Georgia, and John Sherman Cooper (Rep.), of Kentucky, and Representatives Gerald R. Ford (Rep.), of Michigan, and Hale Boggs (Dem.), of Louisiana.

Non-Government members are Allen

W. Dulles, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, and John J. McCloy, former disarmament adviser to President Kennedy.

All seven are busy men. They were reportedly reluctant to accept the assignments in the first place. Some are said to fear their business and political interests may suffer. This is especially true of the Senators and Representatives, particularly in an election year.

The key member, in the eyes of the Administration, is Mr. Warren. Mr. Johnson is said to have wanted the inquiry to be independent of the rest of the Government and free of partisanship.



—USN&WR Photo

OSWALD'S WIFE, Marina, was questioned for three days. She identified 145 exhibits, including the murder rifle.



—UPI Photo

THE ALLEGED ASSASSIN, Lee Harvey Oswald, is shown here in police custody before he was shot. Justice Warren has stated that Oswald is not on trial in hearings.

Thus, Johnson aides say, Mr. Warren was viewed as ideal to head the commission. The High Court is supposedly free from politics and the Chief Justice is widely respected abroad. The theory is that the findings of a panel he heads will not be questioned.

At present, the members privately hold that hearings should be handled behind closed doors, with deliberations at this point in an atmosphere of quiet.

Once the outlines of the case become clearer, however, members reportedly may step up pressure for release of more information—at least when a consensus is reached on major points. They say they, more than anybody else, want the cloak of secrecy removed and the facts made available to everybody.



—USN&WR Photo

OSWALD'S MOTHER, Mrs. Marguerite Oswald, testified at length and told the investigators that her son was innocent.